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ARABIC FOR THE WAYFARER

One of the most conspicuous results and perhaps, when all is said, the most important consequence of the lack of system in English spelling is that for English speakers there does not necessarily exist any fixed relation between a fixed spoken sound and a fixed written sign. Only by painful practice can there be developed for us the fact that a particular character must and can represent only a certain sound, and only after still more experience do we come to it that a sound demands one certain character. But most of us never reach that. Language remains for us syllabic, and syllabic with a wide possibility of indication. This it is which makes so hard the task of the writer in English of a manual of any colloquial dialects. If he adopts a scientific phonetic system, a small circle of students will approve but nine-tenths of his readers will revolt, will find him stiff, unintelligible, "un-English," while if he attempts to meet the demands of the latter for "common-sense spelling," all the specialists will arise and smite him.

Dr. Spoer¹ has taken his chances with the specialists, and frankly met the demands of the enormous majority of English speakers. Phoneticists will gnash their teeth, for there is not a law of their systems which he has not gaily broken; but his public—an ignorant, unscientific public, be it at once admitted—will approve. Like a good teacher, he has accepted his pupil as he is, and met his personal need. His method—for his plan an excellent one—was to show to educated English friends who were not Arabists the written form he proposed to use and to ask them how they would pronounce it, or to pronounce the Arabic word and ask them how they would write it. From that method some very queer-looking forms have resulted; but it was, in its way, perfectly scientific. Arabists soon lose their virginal innocence and the knack of guessing how the uncontaminated "English speller" will pronounce any combination of letters.

On yet another side Dr. Spoer has thrown the specialists over. We have become accustomed of late, in such grammars or colloquial Arabic, to a very precise definition, by territory of tribal ties or conditions of life, of the dialect to be described. The critical imperative has been absolute that you must not mix your dialects. Now, that is all very well for the philological student who surrounds himself with an apparatus of such grammars, lexicons, and painfully phoneticized texts, and with them lays

¹ MANUAL OF PALESTINIAN ARABIC FOR SELF-INSTRUCTION. By H. H. Spoer, Ph.D., and E. Nasrallah Haddad. Jerusalem, 1909. Pp. xiv+226.

out before him his dialectal map. But the wayfaring man has other needs. He must learn, in the quickest and simplest way, to understand and make himself intelligible to all sorts and conditions of men—city-folk, peasants, Bedawin—and for that there is always available a common dialect, an Arabic *lingua franca*, which with good will and patience will carry him through anywhere. That was the element of truth in such pre-scientific grammars of “modern Arabic” as that of Caussin de Perceval, and the present reviewer can testify that even Egyptian Arabic can be made fairly useful in Syria. It is, then, such a colloquial *lingua franca* for Palestine that Dr. Spoer has essayed, taking as his principal basis the educated native dialect of Jerusalem. If anyone knows that, he can go about comfortably and gradually work himself into the details of the narrower local dialect in which his lines may mainly be cast. For it cannot be over-emphasized that, in the end, a colloquial is a colloquial and is to be got by ear and mouth.

The first 84 pages are given to a sketch of grammar, with full examples and vocabularies. Then come 39 pages of illustrations, arranged according to the grammar, but all of daily usefulness. Then another 37 of similar usefulness, but arranged according to material subjects and occasions. Then 24 of stories, songs, proverbs, street-cries, peculiar idioms, etc., and finally 34 of a three-columned English-Arabic vocabulary. There might be more stories, and a full Syrian Arabic-English vocabulary has long been needed; but these are matters rather for a reader than for one learning to hear and speak. The latter either knows what is said to him or he does not; looking up in a vocabulary what he thinks he hears is of very little use. But in plunging himself into speech, he must have some clue to what to say, and that will be given him very clearly and fully by this book. Of course, the book presupposes constant practice of ear and mouth. Only in that way can the sounds peculiar to Arabic be mastered. Elaborate descriptions, especially in the case of the gutturals, of how they are produced may be of scientific interest but are of no practical use. Such are, I think wisely, omitted here, though it might have been well to emphasize the need of elaborate and ever-renewed practice of specimen words with a teacher.

Of course there are details to which exception could be taken. There does not seem, for example, to be any mention of the very common pronunciation among townfolk of Qāf as *hemza*. Yet, on the other hand, the stranger who always gives Qāf its classical sound will be regarded as a person of profound learning. And is not shidd [shedd?] ḥailak (p. 182) rather a precativ perfect with Allah as subject, “May He increase thy strength”?

So it is always in Egypt. The workman there, to whom it is said, regards it as a prayer for him, not as an invitation addressed to him. And (p. 4) it is true that *ḏamīr* is used theologically for "conscience," but that meaning is derivative. The two forces, "pronoun" and "conscience," both come from the fundamental meaning of "hidden thing."

But these are hardly worth mentioning. The book is a good one and to be cordially recommended.

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